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**Sent:** Tuesday, February 19, 2013 9:30 AM  
**To:** AppropriationTestimony  
**Subject:** Testimony for Conservation and Development Hearing Feb. 20

Studies have indicated that every dollar spent on Connecticut State Parks returns \$38 to the Connecticut coffers. Where else could you get such a return on your money?

Connecticut has always been perceived as a beautiful, natural oasis within the heavily-populated East Coast region. By visiting the parks, our residents and tourists from out of state experience our natural world. Our parks and forests are vital because of the educational experiences they provide. These opportunities improve the quality of life for everyone.

It is important to protect our parks and maintain them properly. Do not squander our precious resource with budgetary slashing.

In our economy, the buzz word is "jobs." Adding jobs, keeping jobs, educating for jobs.....these phrases show up in every political speech. Why are jobs at state parks being eliminated or left unfilled? Why are parks closing because the state ignores their value?

Not everyone can be trained to be a computer geek or business guru. Our state needs to provide employment opportunities for all its citizens. Our park system can provide jobs. Teaching others about our natural world and its amazing history, maintaining woodlands, and providing safe outdoor environments for our youngest citizens where they can absorb and experience a calmer place in our world are essential for maintaining and improving our quality of life in Connecticut. These are jobs that must be retained.

Dinosaur State Park is a good example. It has been designated a Registered Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of Interior because it is one of the largest dinosaur track sites in North America and has a display of early Jurassic fossil tracks that were made 200 million years ago. The park has more than two miles of nature trails and a nationally recognized arboretum containing more than 250 species and cultivars of plant families which appeared during the Age of Dinosaurs. Over the years, the state has reduced the full-time staff by eliminating positions or leaving positions unfilled. Nearly 80 thousand people visit Dinosaur State Park each year. It is a learning place in the woods serving as a university, a high school, an elementary school, and science center for all ages. How can the park continue if the state considers it non-essential to our residents and visitors?

Susan Lionberger

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